

Principal Decision Report



Subject:	Parental Advocacy Service Tender
Decision maker: Senior Officer:	Shelley Kipling, Chief Executive Julie Daniels Executive Director Children and Young People (DCS)
Decision date:	9 September 2026
Report author:	Laura Farnworth Children's Commissioning Strategic Manager Nick Whitbread Assistant Director Corporate Parenting
Ward (s):	n/a

Reason for decision

Permission is sought to undertake a robust and transparent commissioning and procurement exercise, overseen by a project board including children, young people and families, to commission a new service, Parental Advocacy.

The service will have a funding envelope of £83,000 per annum and will be awarded as a two-year contract with the option to extend for up to an additional one-year dependent on funding availability.

The Parental Advocacy service will be funded through the Families First Partnership (FFP) Grant to support and empower parents to fully understand processes, plans and decisions, enabling them to fully participate in Family Help assessments, child in need planning, child protection processes and Family Group Decision Making.

Recommendation(s)

Option One

Approve the design, tender and contract award to the highest scoring bidder, of a new service, Parental Advocacy. The service will have a maximum funding envelope of £83,000 per annum as part of Oldham's Families First Partnership Programme with an initial contract period of two years from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2029 with the option of a possible extension period of one year up until 31 March 2030.

Background

The Role of Parental Advocacy

Parental advocacy aligns strongly with the principles and ambitions of FFP and can be used to support in delivering these reforms.

Parental advocacy can:

- Help parents understand processes, plans and decisions, enabling informed participation in Family Help assessments, child in need planning, child protection processes and Family Group Decision Making.
- Strengthen the voice of families, ensuring parents' views, wishes and strengths are clearly represented and considered in decision-making.
- Promote genuine co-production, supporting the FFP expectation that families are partners in planning rather than passive recipients of services.
- Build trust between families and professionals, helping to reduce conflict and improve engagement with services.
- Support early resolution of concerns, reducing escalation to complaints, disputes or more intensive statutory intervention.
- Improve access and inclusion, particularly for parents who may face barriers related to language, disability, literacy, mental health, or previous negative experiences of services.
- Contribute to family-led planning, helping families prepare for and engage effectively in Family Group Decision Making and the development of Family Network Support Plans.

Parental Advocacy has been piloted in a number of Local Authorities across the UK through the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme and has received positive feedback. It is often delivered by peer supporters who have lived experience of child protection.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 places local authorities under a statutory duty to offer Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM) to all parents of children at risk of entering care, and to put independent advocacy support in place. Through Families First Partnership work, there is an opportunity to design and commission a new service to support Oldham's families.

On 12 August 2026, Children and Young People DMT gave approval to procure a bespoke training package from an organisation called Relational Activism to support ongoing FFP development in Oldham. One strand of this training focuses on Parental Advocacy which would support the commissioning of this new service.

The development and tender of the service would be overseen by a project board including young people and families and tendered via an open, transparent full procurement and commissioning process via the procurement portal, The Chest. The new service will be funded through FFP and will meet DfE requirements as part of FFP developments.

Alternative option(s) to be considered

Option One (recommended)

Approve the design, tender and contract award of a new service, Parental Advocacy. The service will have a maximum funding envelope of £83,000 per annum as part of Oldham's Families First Partnership Programme with an initial contract period of two years from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2029 with the option of a one year extension period up until 31 March 2030 subject to funding being available and the service still meeting need.

This option is recommended as it will provide timely support for Oldham's most vulnerable families and will ensure Oldham fully delivers the DfE Families First Partnership Programme requirements and its statutory duties under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.

Option Two

Go out to tender for the Parental Advocacy Service as outlined in Option One but delay the start of the commissioning process and have a start date for the service of 1 July 2027.

This option would allow a longer design phase which would be beneficial as the project board would be able to work with Relational Activism on the service design, specification and tender questions. However, it is a risk as the funding envelope has been sourced from the FFP budget and the council needs to demonstrate that these funds are fully committed by 31 March 2027. This would result in different time frames for contracts for both Children's and Parental Advocacy, making it more complex to align the services in the future if a decision was taken to do so.

Option Three

Do not develop and commission a Parental Advocacy service in Oldham. This option is not recommended as it puts the council at risk of failing to deliver to the FFP requirements set out by the DfE.

Consultation

As part of the FFP reforms, consultation has taken place with Oldham families across the borough. Information collected will be used to shape the service specification. The whole project will be co-produced and have involvement from children, young people and families including service design, evaluating bids and contract monitoring.

Risks

- Few, if any, high-quality bids received for the services. This can be mitigated by ensuring the specification is appropriate. A Meet the Market event has also taken place to stimulate interest.
- Risk of losing funds from the FFP budget if monies are not fully committed by 31 March 2027.

- Risk of not being able to meet the timelines for the tender causing the service start date to be delayed. This can be mitigated by the project being overseen by the project board to ensure it moves at pace.
- Failure to deliver the FFP programme in line with DfE requirements if we do not commission a Parental Advocacy service.

Implications

Financial	The preferred option 1 is to approve the design, tender and contract award of a new service, Parental Advocacy, for an initial contract period of 2 years commencing 1 April 2027 with an option to extend 1 year subject to funding. The maximum amount of funding is £83k per annum which is qualifying expenditure against the Children’s, Families and Youth grant – Families First Partnership Programme. The funding for FFPP was included in the Local Government Financial Settlement; £3.495m 2026/27 & 2027/28, £2.587m 2028/29. There are adequate financial resources remaining to fund the contract to March 2029 however the option to extend 1 year to March 2030 would be subject to a further report. (Nicola Harrop – Finance Manager)								
Legal	The proposal is lawful and complies with the Contract Procedure Rules. The services may be in scope of the light touch regime which has a Procurement Act 2023 threshold of £655, 000. Bryan Boese - solicitor								
Procurement	Based on a spend of £166k (if not inc VAT then £199,200 inc VAT) this would be in the £100k to threshold. This value is below the PA23 threshold (£207k). The following thresholds are calculated as including VAT <table><tr><th>Contract Value</th><th>Procurement Activity</th><th>Instructions</th><th>Minimum Requirement for Advertising the Opportunity</th></tr><tr><td>Between £100,000 and Procurement Regulations threshold for Supplies, Works and Services or Concessions</td><td>Formal Tender Process</td><td>Open Service Area to contact the Commercial Procurement Unit who will conduct an appropriate procurement procedure in accordance with these Contract Procedure Rules. Tenders to be conducted in accordance with Rule 6.</td><td>The Chest and Contracts Finder</td></tr></table>	Contract Value	Procurement Activity	Instructions	Minimum Requirement for Advertising the Opportunity	Between £100,000 and Procurement Regulations threshold for Supplies, Works and Services or Concessions	Formal Tender Process	Open Service Area to contact the Commercial Procurement Unit who will conduct an appropriate procurement procedure in accordance with these Contract Procedure Rules. Tenders to be conducted in accordance with Rule 6.	The Chest and Contracts Finder
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	As an open tender is being proposed this aligns with the requirements of the CPRs. James England – Procurement Manager
H.R	There are therefore no anticipated impacts on the Council's staffing establishment, organisational structure, terms and conditions of employment, or existing workforce arrangements. No TUPE implications have been identified at this stage as this is a new service being commissioned rather than a service currently delivered by Council employees. N.Needham - Workforce Business Partner – 14.08.2026
Equality impact including implications for Children and Young People	The completed Equality Impact Assessment shows no negative impacts for residents. A copy is included in Appendix 1.

Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

None

Appendix

1. Equality Impact Assessment



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Report author sign-off	Laura Farnworth
Role	Children's Commissioning Strategic Manager
Date of sign-off	27 August 2026

Approval	
Officer approval sign-off	Julie Daniels
Role	Executive Director, Children and Young People (DCS)
Date of sign-off	

Approval	
Officer approval sign-off	Shelley Kipling
Role	Chief Executive
Date of sign-off	